

Book Review. Perret-Clermont, A.-N. Morerod, J.-D. & Blanc, J. (Eds.) (2022). *Cultures et guérisons. Éric de Rosny, l'intégrale*. Paris : Livreo-Alphil.

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We can't thank enough Anne-Nelly Perret-Clermont, Jean-Daniel Morerod and Jérémie Blanc for the opportunity they have given us to access texts by Eric de Rosny that are little known or little appreciated. They give us the opportunity to explore, in chronological order, writings that express, in close union: life stories, accounts of encounters, reflections that provide the material for a body of work. Covering more than 1,000 pages in three volumes, the book is accompanied by a bibliography of more than a hundred references.

For someone as deeply affected by Eric de Rosny's '*Les yeux de ma chèvre*' [English translation: "*Healers in the night*"]¹ as I was when it was published in 1981, this collection of texts could only be welcome. But discovering this veritable compendium of a body of work, the acuity of its author's vision, the beauty of his style, his sensitivity to the Other, the openness of his listening, the generosity of his support, the authenticity of his commitment to a faith and respect for that of others, was a revelation.

Prefaced by Jean Benoist, physician and anthropologist, and by Prince René Douala Manga-Bell, this compilation is preceded by "glimpses" of the man and his work by specialists

¹ Éric de Rosny, *Les Yeux de ma chèvre. Sur les pas des maîtres de la nuit en pays douala*, Cameroun, Paris, Plon, 1981 (« Terre humaine ») [English translation: *Healers in the night*. Orbis book, 1985].

in the social sciences: anthropology, history, linguistics, psychoanalysis and sociology². This shows the importance of both the thinker, a witness to his time, and his writings on the medical field, for a global approach to the subject.

In their introduction, the editors of this collection, referred to Eric de Rosny as his 'heirs', introduce the man they knew and worked with for almost twenty years at the University of Neuchâtel where he was a regular guest. Born into a noble family in the west of France and raised and lived in the 7th arrondissement of Paris, Eric de Rosny was attracted to distant lands from an early age. After his military service in war-torn Algeria, and as soon as he finished his clerical training, he left as a Jesuit to teach in Africa, in Cameroon. He learnt the customs and language of Cameroon, settled in the suburbs of Douala to better integrate into the urban community, and was accepted into the "brotherhood of stem men", the nganga (diviners). In this way, he was able to penetrate and get to know, from the inside, a culture at the crossroads between tradition and modernity.

The texts collected in the three volumes of "*Cultures et guérisons*" (*Cultures and healing*) constitute, in a way, the "logbook" of a discovery of African culture in which the actor is initiated into its rites, deciphers its messages and opens up to its vision, without breaking with his religious and cultural roots and their achievements. This is how Eric de Rosny, a Jesuit teacher and missionary, came to be recognised as an authentic anthropologist, albeit with some reservations. And it was when he was passing on the experience he had acquired among the Nganga that he resorted to the notion of 'representation', on which I shall dwell, as I did not have the necessary skills to deal with the passages concerning his faith, his religious practice and his doctrinal bases.

It is precisely in his examination of the relationship between religion and faith that Eric de Rosny calls on the notion of 'representation' as a 'useful concept in anthropology' (pp. 1065-1067). Having to address an audience of students, he used the notion of representation as a means of "theorising [his] experience". To enhance the value of the medical treatments he had observed, he insisted on the fact that "medical practice (and in part its effectiveness) depended on the representation we made of man". He thus contrasted two "cosmo-anthropological" approaches to man: that of African healers and that of the hospital environment.

This perspective will lead to a reflection on the status and importance of representation, conceived as "an inherent element of the illness to be treated, to be dealt with as much as the lesion", a formula taken from another anthropologist, Jean Benoist. He himself recalls a key

² The contributors are: Roberto Beneduce, Jacques Fédry, Peter Geschiere, Émile Kenmogne, Berthe Lolo, Thomas Théophile Nug Bissohong, Gilles Séraphin.

phrase from the lectures he gave at the Catholic University of West Africa: “Man is only ill as a function of the cultural model of representation in which his illness is born, develops and - at best - cures”. Medical practice (and, in part, its effectiveness) therefore is closely depended on the way man is represented”.

So understanding a culture other than one's own, which is the basis for exchange and cooperation, involves updating representations. For Eric de Rosny, a "situating gaze", a "participative" and "committed" observation, a "spiritual hospitality", enable us to discover the meaning of individual and collective behaviour, the particularities of a culture. And, as a result, to guide the actions of the researcher who intervenes there, to enlighten the reading of his observations. These qualities are amply presented in the three volumes that bring together the writings of Eric de Rosny, illustrated by a number of photographs that bear witness to the brilliance of his presence and his social involvement.